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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement by
Congressman Tom McClintock
Chairman, House Subcommittee on Water and Power
At the Oversight Field Hearing on

"Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act"
April 11, 2011

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During the last session of Congress, Republicans unsuccessfully attempted for two years to get the Water and Power Sub-Committee to come to Fresno to hear first-hand from the communities that have endured the devastating financial, social and environmental damage done by the government's decision to deny this region 200 billion gallons of water to indulge the pet causes of the environmental Left.

A little over a year ago, Republicans held an informal listening session, at which time we heard riveting testimony of the human suffering caused by this misguided policy.

- We heard the stories of food lines in communities that once prided themselves on supplying American grocery shelves.
- We heard about the frustration of seeing the same produce once grown in the Central Valley of California instead imported from China -- handed out at those Central Valley food lines.
- And we saw the anger as the absent Secretary's testimony to the Natural Resources Committee in 2009 was played back, in which he admitted that the Obama administration had the authority to restore water deliveries but that it chose not to do so because that would be -- quote -- like admitting failure.

Even now, with the snowpack at 165 percent of normal for the season -- the wettest year in the last 16 -- the San Joaquin Valley has been guaranteed only 75 percent of its contracted allotments.

In this discussion, the left has attempted to pit fishermen against farmers. What they ignore, of course, is the actual science:

- They ignore the findings of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center that determined the Pacific Decadal Oscillation is the principal reason for changes in salmon migration; that these changes are not unique to Delta fisheries but have been observed throughout the Pacific Coast; and that as those conditions have improved over the last several years, salmon populations are rebounding.

- They ignore the California Department of Water Resources analysis of pumping flows that determined that their influence on salmon and smelt migration is negligible compared to natural tidal flows.
- They ignore the overwhelming impact of natural predation in the Delta that alone is responsible for some 90 percent of salmon smolt mortality.
- They ignore the tremendous contribution of fish hatcheries to supporting fish populations.
- They ignore – indeed, they actively oppose – the construction of new reservoirs and other water projects that could dramatically increase year-round supplies of fresh cold water throughout the Delta.
- They ignore the findings of the Federal District Court that the U.S. Interior Department's biological opinion on Delta smelt to be "arbitrary, capricious and contrary to law."
- And worst of all, they ignore the plight of the tens of thousands of farm families needlessly thrown into unemployment by these policies.

For too long, our government policies have been misguided by politically motivated junk science instead of the sober, dispassionate and accurate application of real science. For too long, our government policies have focused on rationing of shortages rather than on providing abundance.

Today we will hear testimony about what these policies have done to harm the economy of the Central Valley and the cornucopia of fruits, nuts and vegetables it once produced for the entire world. And we will hear suggestions on the changes in federal law that need to be made to restore abundance and plenty to all those who rely on the Delta.

I know that people are feeling powerless and disregarded by Washington. But the fact is that the debates inside the capitol are merely a reflection of a much larger debate going on across the country. The public is rapidly engaging, becoming aware of these past policies and demanding change. As this occurs, public policy will follow.

Chairman Hastings has made it very clear that he wants priority given to this issue, and from this hearing today, the House majority will craft legislation to restore abundance as the principal objective of federal water and power policy -- and with it, an era of abundant water, clean and cheap hydroelectricity, new recreational centers, desperately needed flood protection, burgeoning fisheries, re-invigorated farms – not to mention lower electricity, water and flood insurance bills for American families.

It is toward that brighter and more prosperous future that this majority seeks to proceed. It is my hope that the testimony today will assist the House in identifying those changes in law necessary to get there.